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A WAR NURSE IN THE FIGHTING FIELDS OF EUROPE

BY KATHERINE B. McMAHON, R.N.

Dorchester, Massachusetts

When England sent word to America that she was in need of medical aid, Harvard University sent the first unit, consisting of thirty-five doctors and seventy-five nurses. We sailed from New York on June 25th, 1915, fully sensitive to the perilous trip we were about to take. On nearing the war zone, we traveled at night in total darkness, with the exception of the glaring headlight, and the name of the ship which was in five feet electric letters on either side of the steamer.

We arrived in Falmouth Harbor on July 6th, and after the usual preliminaries took a special train to London. England looked very beautiful to us and over everything was such an air of peace that it was impossible to realize that war was really going on. Upon our arrival in London, we were received by a representative of the War Department, who thanked us heartily for coming, and we were entertained most royally. Here men of all stations in life were in uniform, and there was that solemn aspect over everything which made us appreciate the fact that truly a terrible war was waging, but the seriousness of the situation was more apparent to us when we crossed the Channel in a hospital ship and arrived in Boulogne.

This French port was at all times a busy, but light-hearted place of amusement, but now, how changed. Anchored around the quay were many hospital ships. Packed high on the wharf were rolls of barbed wire and countless sand bags, used in trench-making, together with provisions for the millions of people in England and France. There were cars of all sizes and shapes bearing the red Geneva Cross, and men in khaki moved about in every direction. In fewer numbers were the French soldiers in their red and blue uniforms, which were dingy with wear and weather, or resplendent in the new blue and gray. On one side was a crowd of Tommies waiting for the train that would take them to Flanders, whistling or singing. A little distance away, one could see a group of wounded fighters ready to go to "Blighty" (that much desired refuge of the British soldier), the sight of bandages bringing home to us that they had already been in battle.

Our final destination was some miles south of the firing line, and we arrived here in the middle of July, going to work immediately, as there was a great deal to do. Our camp was situated in a valley facing the English Channel, surrounded by poppy-covered hills. There

were about twenty thousand beds for patients in this one valley. The beds in our hospital were all under canvas.

Each nurse, when assigned to her respective tent was given three army blankets and a large canvas bag, in which she was told she would find everything needed for comfort. We were incredulous of finding *everything*, but what was our surprise, on opening this Pandora box, to find a folding cot, a cork mattress, a washstand, a small table, chair, canvas pail in which to carry water, a lantern, an enameled plate, a drinking cup, a knife, fork and teaspoon. Truly, they had not exaggerated.

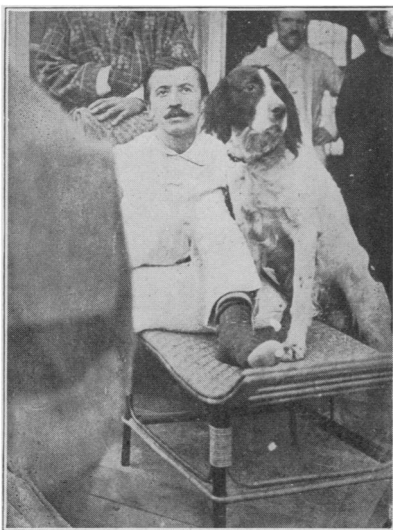
Patients now began to come in large numbers, and our excitement can hardly be described when our first convoy arrived. Each man was tagged, this tag bearing his name and the nature of his wound. If he were dangerously wounded, he had a red tag, which meant that he must have immediate and special attention. We received men from all along the western front, from Ypres, Hooze, Hill No. 60 and Armentieres. If they improved to any marked degree, we were allowed to keep them until fully recovered, otherwise they would be sent to a hospital in England.

One thing that will ever remain in our minds as an example of the diabolical cleverness and brutality of the Germans is the first exhibition of the effects of liquid fire, used for the first time on August 2nd, when a convoy was brought in to us wounded most horribly, and worst of all, burned indescribably. The men related afterwards that previous to this attack, they were inactive in the trenches, as nothing was going on except a light bombardment. Suddenly the men in the first line trenches saw, rolling toward them in No Man's Land, something which, at first sight, looked like petroleum. One man said, "Hello, what is this coming toward us? It looks to me as though it might be petroleum." Almost immediately this so-called petroleum burst into flame, and those in the first line trenches were almost all burned to death. The few that did survive this fire were choked by the poisonous gases which accompanied the fire. Those in the second line of trenches now saw the enemy rushing toward them clothed in chemically charged coats and gas helmets, looking like terrible monsters of prey. One man cried, "We are going to die anyway, and we will die fighting." So they rushed forward to meet the enemy in a bayonet attack, gaining a little of the lost ground, but, of course, their losses were heavy. Had they been prepared for this liquid fire, and been equipped with gas masks, their retreat would have been unnecessary.

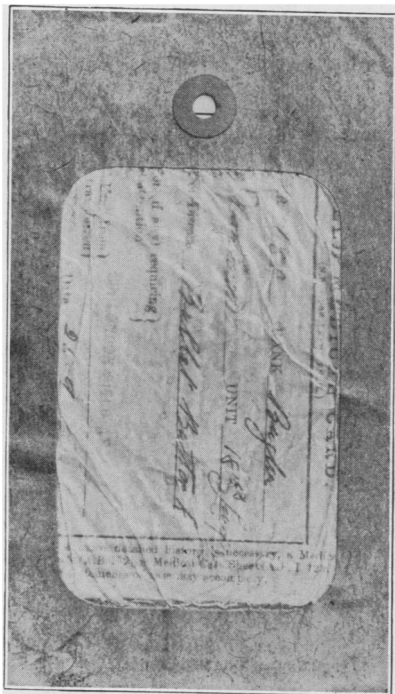
On September 24th we received instructions to increase our bed capacity by five hundred, and be ready by the next day, as one of the



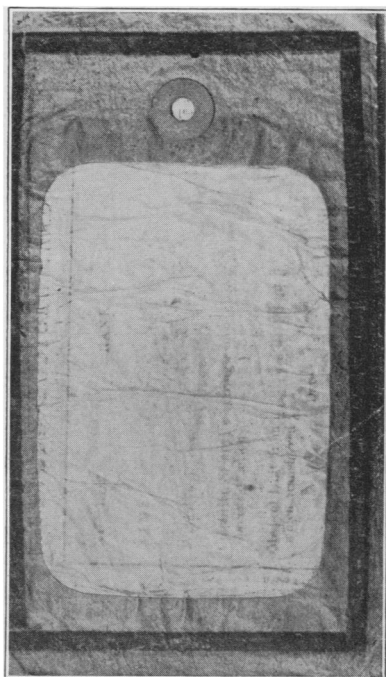
Katherine B. MacMahon



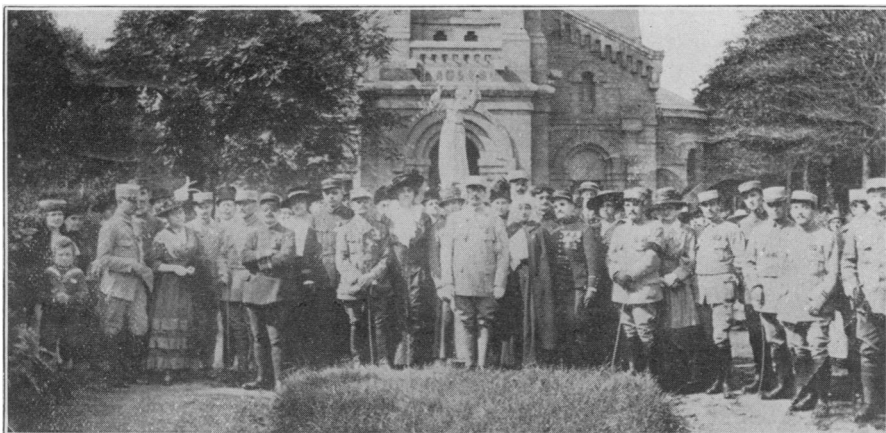
The Only Dog Decorated by the President of France for Saving His Master's Life.



A Patient's Tag



Tag with a Red Border Showing the Patient Needs Immediate Attention.



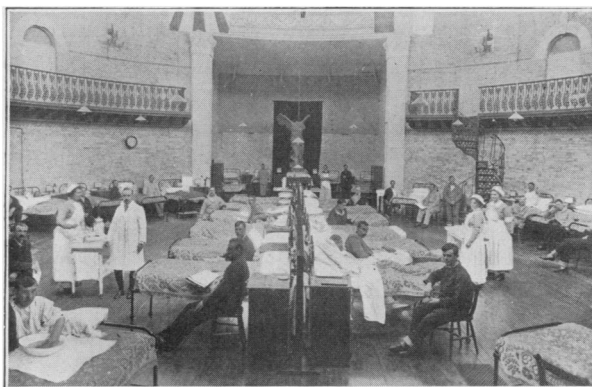
Marriage of a French Nurse, a Countess, to a Blind Soldier. The Abbe and the Attendants Were Blind, Also.



The Wild Man from Borneo, Who at First Attacked Doctors and Nurses and Slept under His Bed.



Group of Patients at American Ambulance Hospital, France



**Ward in the American Women's War Hospital,
Paignton, England.**



Patients in the Same Hospital

biggest battles was about to take place. On September 25th at day-break, this battle of the Loos was fought. Never will I forget the condition of these men as they came in to us, hatless, their sleeves and trousers tattered and cut, some with bandaged heads, and others with emergency bandages showing through trousers split up the side; still others with crude rope splints on broken arms (for the demand for splints had been greater than the supply), and most touching of all was the sight of one soldier holding up the other to prove that he did not have to be carried. There was not a dry eye among the nurses or doctors at this spectacle, but our tears were quickly dried when their feelings in the matter were displayed by the following remark made by a Jock: "Oh, sister, do not cry, for even though we have suffered, what does that matter? We have gained all the ground that we lost on August 2nd. Isn't that worth all this?" And so, even though our hearts were heavy, we went back to our ground with smiling faces, glad and proud that we could be of service to these brave men. In the first twelve hours we treated seven hundred patients; that is, brought them in from the hospital train, performed all necessary operations, did all dressings, gave them something to eat (together with their much beloved cigarette), and put them in an ambulance train for "Blighty."

It was not always a steady grind of sad and heart-rending incidents, however, for our work depended entirely on what went on at the front, and camp life had its pleasant side as well as pathetic. For entertainment, concerts were given at the Y. M. C. A. and Knights of Columbus huts. All men who were at all physically able to attend went to these affairs; the stronger ones carrying those unable to walk, "piggy-back" fashion, and others supporting themselves with poles, borrowed from tents for the occasion. It was an odd procession that wended its way along the worn old road to the concert, which was appreciated far more than grand opera by the boys, who would return to the camp tired but happy. Every afternoon, tea was served, for we appreciated how tiresome the rations became. We were on those same army rations ourselves, consisting of "bully beef," vegetables every other day, canned butter, bread and jam. The bread was baked in England, coming to the camp in truck loads. A certain number of loaves was assigned to different divisions, passing from hand to hand without covering of any kind. Thoughts of microbes had to be sternly banished from our minds when we watched this proceeding, for this was no time to be fastidious. Later, however, our rations were much improved, when we found that by paying a franc a day, we could have added luxuries.

Spies were everywhere in our valley. To get through the lines, one must be in uniform and have her passport. The deadly work of the spies was evidenced at every turn. Candy was poisoned, and worst of all the well from which we obtained our water supply was found to be infected with death germs. No uncooked food was allowed to be eaten.

At the American Ambulance in Paris we had about seven hundred beds, this number to be increased during big engagements. Our patients were mostly French soldiers. The doctors were American, and the nurses came from all over the world. Nurses' aids were American women of great wealth, duchesses and countesses, while the orderlies were dukes, counts, artists and actors. Through all, a wonderful spirit of coöperation prevailed. There was nothing too small for anyone to do, and it was this unity that won for the hospital the success that it attained.

Our American doctors are doing wonderful work in France. There is an explosive bullet which affects the jaw, breaking it into many parts. Then our doctors will transplant a piece of tibia and make a new jaw, attaching it to the upper by a small hinge. Skin is grafted over this, and a little later, artificial teeth are inserted. In one month's time, one would be surprised at the wonderful change. A man would be able to eat and talk, whereas if he did not have this treatment he would die. A limb rendered useless by the muscle or nerve being severed can be remedied by transplanting muscle from another part of the body. Marvelous results are accomplished by bone and skin grafting.

In one of the hospitals where artificial limbs are applied, the patients are divided into three sections. In the first section are the men who are being taught to walk with the artificial limb, they are so timid about stepping out; then the second section, where they are a little more courageous; and the third, where they are able to walk around naturally, and even, in many cases, play ball.

The saddest cases of all were the blind. There are comparatively few, however, considering the number of head wounds. These are so skillfully treated by our surgeons that blindness is, in many cases, averted. Owing to the wonderful feats that have been performed by our doctors since this war, a man (unless handicapped to too great an extent), is taught a trade so that when discharged from the hospital, he may be independent.

Now that our own country is at war fighting for democracy against tyrannical Germany, we need all who can give their services. Men gladly give up their lives without question because they know it is their duty and no American man hesitates. The nurses are needed

to help care for our own boys, and everyone who has any knowledge or training in nursing should do "her bit" in winning this war. It is not a question of letting someone else do it. It is the men's place to do the fighting, but it is the nurses of America who are needed to nurse the men back to health. More nurses will be wanted and we should all volunteer our services gladly and be proud that we can do something for our dear country. The time has arrived when every woman is just as important as the man who goes off to Flanders to fight. They have a duty to perform and must perform it, no matter what their position in life. Any who have the time, money and ability to render aid to their country and fail to do so, are slackers. But nurses are not in this class, their part is an active one, and absolutely necessary. They will stand shoulder to shoulder with the soldier, always helping, untiring, courageous, cheerful, and praying for a lasting peace.

NURSES, JOIN NOW!

BY DOROTHY FOSTER, R.N.

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

In the hope of reaching the nurses of America who have not yet availed themselves of the privilege of nursing the Allied soldiers, I will tell them of the things which seem to me most important in the work over there.

The most interesting work is undoubtedly with the Army in France. I spent nine months with the Harvard Unit, which is No. 22 General Hospital, British Expeditionary Force. Each day brought convoys of patients, sometimes seventy, sometimes four hundred, sometimes several convoys a day or night, and in a corresponding number patients were sent away to England.

To go on duty in a large tent and find strange, haggard, unshaven faces, to know that you alone are responsible for the well-being of a certain number and to see the change in their general condition and the improvement in their wounds after a few days' care is reward for your work which no other work in the world can give. Of course, it is not always a quick recovery and often none at all. Some poor lad may come in, a walking case, and die of gas, bacillus infection, or tetanus a few days later. Then the nurse has to help this lad over the bar. The nurse is closer to the soldier than is any one else. The British people call her "Sister" and this title characterizes their attitude towards her. Only the nurse knows when and what gifts are welcome; so many, many times have I seen a few cigarettes make